

The Ballarat Naturalist

May
~~April~~ 2010



EXCURSION TO BALLARAT COMMON, MCARTHUR PARK WETLAND AND LAKE WENDOUREE.

SUNDAY APRIL 11, 2010. LED BY KEN HAMMOND

We met at the boatsheds on Lake Wendouree near Forest St and drove to the Ballarat Common in rather overcast and windy conditions. After recent rain the access road looked somewhat doubtful, but Ken had checked it out of course. We had a pleasant, if rather cool, walk along the dam wall and to the west, with occasional patches of sunshine.



Ballarat Common

Birds seen on the wetland included approximately 20-30 Pacific Black Ducks; 10 Swans; 2 White-faced Heron; 2 Masked Lapwing; 2 Hoary-headed Grebe (one darker in colour); a Black-fronted Dotterel. On a separate pond south of the main dam, about 100 Welcome

Swallows were feeding frantically above the water. Birds seen on adjacent dry land were Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos (in Pine trees); Blue Wrens (Superb Fairy Wren); Magpies; Goldfinch (very fast flying in the strong wind).

A few plants noted on grassland were *Wahlenbergia stricta* – native bluebell; *Lobelia* sp. (prostrate plant with bluish-white flower); *Eryngium* sp. – Prickwort (10 cm herb with pointed, serrate leaves);

McArthur Park Wetland

From the Common we drove through the McArthur Park suburb to the artificial ponds, located just above Burrumbeet Creek, which also drains the Ballarat Common area. The native shrubs and trees seem to be thriving here – but the only birds seen were a few Pacific Black Ducks and one Dusky Moorhen. The group returned to Lake Wendouree for a lunch, and further walks.

North Gardens and Lake Wendouree

After lunch in the area near Fairyland, the walk started by crossing the road to the North Gardens Wetlands. No matter how often we visit this area there is always something of interest to see. As the weather was still overcast and there was a brisk breeze the birds



Little Pied Cormorant

seemed to be fewer in number than usual. Pacific Black Ducks were present as was a young fluffy Grebe that was too immature to identify the exact species. Welcome Swallows circled overhead as we spotted a Grey Teal.

When attendees at the SEANA campout visited the wetland, they observed a young Night Heron. This was an unusual sighting as these birds are active at night. We had no luck in seeing it during our visit. A young River Red Gum in full bud was a feature as the occasional ray of sunshine hit the glistening leaves and buds. Although we could not see any

frogs, their chorus followed us around the wetlands. We spotted a Blackbird, New Holland Honeyeater and after some concerted work with the binoculars, some Brown Thornbills.

Four Common Bronzewing spent some time on the ground under a tree fossicking through leaf litter allowing us to get a close look at them. A Grey Fantail flitted through the shrubbery nearby. The highlight was probably seeing a Long Necked Turtle sunning itself out of the water on a dead branch in the water. After Denis took a great photo of it, the turtle disappeared into the water.

It was then back to Lake Wendouree



Nesting swan

where we saw quite a few White and Straw Neck Ibis in the distance. The lake without water provides a wonderful habitat and the different patches of vegetation with varying levels of water are like looking at a tapestry. Up to the Friday before the excursion, the number of different birds observed by Roger Thomas since January was one hundred and eight. The bird list for the lake is one hundred and thirty species.

As you would expect there were Black Ducks and Swampheens. Further away near the middle on the lake were a few groups of Shelducks and a White Faced Heron. Paul observed a flock of Silvereyes managing to eat the fruit of a tall Cordyline. The fruit is about the size of a small pea, white with grey spots.

While Sulphur-crested Cockatoos flew in a screeching flock overhead, another was enlarging a hollow in a Poplar tree near the restaurant. The most interesting cockatoo was the one going for a stroll around Fairyland perched on the shoulder of his owner. The dog was on a lead, but "Mate" appeared to be free to fly off if he wanted.



We were able to get reasonably close to a Little Pied Cormorant as it sat on a stick projecting out of the water before it took flight. It was in the area behind the restaurant. In the same area we saw a Swan sitting on a nest. Was it too late or too early to be sitting? John and Carol spotted at least two eggs after careful observation. How do you tell the difference between the male and female swans? Apparently, the males have a thicker neck and look generally heavier. The male is usually the one seen sitting on the nest during the day.

Other birds observed were three Cattle Egrets, more Welcome Swallows, Coots, Seagulls, Little Raven, Kookaburra, Brown Falcon, Blackbird, White-eyed Duck (or Hardhead) and a Grey Fantail. Although not seen we heard Masked Lapwing and a Mudlark. The Brown Falcon had not been sighted at the lake so far this year, it is in fact species 109 for 2010

Thanks to Ken for leading the excursion and answering our many and varied questions. Some of us were new visitors to the sites so it was good to add to our list of places to visit. Thank you also to John G who brought the scope that allowed us a closer look at the birds. As usual, despite the weather, there was plenty to keep us interested.

Notes by John Petheram and Elspeth Swan. Photographs from Elspeth Swan.

Membership Fees are now due!

| | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Ordinary member (Adult) | \$35.00 |
| Family | \$55.00 |
| Distant Members | \$15.00 |
| Student Member | \$15.00 |



THANK YOU HELEN!

Helen Burgess recently retired from the Committee of the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat. We would like to pay this tribute to Helen for the outstanding service she has given the Club. Helen has been a Committee member for more than 30 years, holding office for four terms as President, three terms as Vice-President and seven terms as Secretary.

During this time she has made a great and sustained contribution to the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat. Some of her most valued contributions have been:

- Leading many excursions.
- Sharing her botanical knowledge.
- Presenting travel talks.
- Being a source of contact for speakers.
- Helping to raise funds by providing plants and preserves for trading tables.

When Helen sees that a job needs doing she has quietly made sure that the work is done.

The Committee and members thank Helen very much for her service and hope in her 'retirement' she continues to enjoy our meetings and excursions.



**Silver Banksia—
Banksia marginata—
an example of Helen's
artistic skill.**

WARMING & DRYING TRENDS

Two evenings to learn facts, understand how to adapt your enterprise, and meet those who have created a system more robust to climate change by integrating biodiversity and production values.

1. **Wednesday 19 May 2010** from 7pm to 9 pm – Making use of climate and weather knowledge. How will I adapt my cropping enterprises to drying times?

Presenters: Climate change specialist Deane Price/ Chris Sounness from the Department of Primary Industries. Deane and/or Chris will provide practical ways to deal with variability and reduce risk and engage the audience in a discussion around these factors.

2. **Wednesday 9 June 2010** from 7pm to 9 pm – Conservation and production - Natural allies. How can I protect and maintain productive lands, enjoy wildlife and the beauty of conservation areas, cope with climate change- and still be economically healthy?

Presenter: Ray Thomas founder of the Regent Honeyeater Project near Benella and the organization's president Rob Richardson a beef producer and agroforester. For 15 years this project has been involving farmers, researchers and local schools in restoring indigenous vegetation to support rare birds and animals. Involving a community to restore a landscape has many benefits including attracting on average a 1,000 volunteers each year and providing a systems approach to meeting more variable weather patterns.

All evenings at the Burrumbeet RSL Hall - Gold coin donation

Contact Susan Moodie:

SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH: 'WILDLIFE DISASTER HERALDS SILENT SUMMER'

AFTER *Silent Spring*, Britain now faces the silent summer. Fifty years after Rachel Carson's seminal book about humanity's impact on nature, Sir David Attenborough has warned that Britain's wildlife could be on the edge of the next great environmental disaster. He has written the foreword to a new book, *Silent Summer*, in which 40 leading British ecologists detail how factors such as pesticides, population growth and intensive farming are destroying the plants, insects and animals on which the rest of the country's wildlife depends.

The book describes the decline of 75% of butterfly species, the near disappearance of many moths and similar reverses for bees, flies and snails.

Attenborough warns that such organisms make up the foundations of Britain's ecosystems. "We tend to focus on the bigger animals and ignore the smaller ones — but small creatures like these are the basis of our entire ecosystems and they are disappearing faster than ever. That loss is transforming our wildlife and countryside," he said.

The 600-page book was edited by Norman Maclean, emeritus professor of genetics at Southampton University, who chose its title to invoke Carson's study of the impact of pollutants on wildlife.

Published in 1962, *Silent Spring* helped launch the global environmental movement and, in Britain, prompted an eventual ban on pesticides such as DDT.

Maclean believes, however, that such triumphs have done little to slow the destruction. "The evidence is that we could be in the middle of the next great extinction of wildlife, both globally and in Britain," he said.

Butterflies are among the hardest hit of insect groups. Five species are extinct and, of the 59 that regularly breed in Britain, most have seen sharp declines in population. Jeremy Thomas, professor of ecology at Oxford University, who wrote *Silent Summer*'s chapter on butterflies, said populations were falling faster than almost any other group.

The reason, he suggests, is that the caterpillars of many species need particular plant species to feed on — but these are often targeted by farmers as weeds. "Nearly every butterfly decline can be attributed to habitat loss or the degradation and increased isolation of surviving patches of habitat," he said.

The story is similar for moths, whose overall population declined by more than a third from 1968 to 2002, when the last survey was carried out. At least 20 of the larger species, such as the dusky thorn and the hedge rustic, have suffered population declines of more than 90%.

Britain's rivers have been hit, too — with scientists charting a general collapse in populations of caddisflies, mayflies and stoneflies. Such species were once renowned for forming vast, shimmering swarms as their aquatic larvae hatched and took to the air in summer. They also provided an important source of food for birds, fish, bats and predatory insects.

Cyril Bennett, a researcher with the Riverfly Partnership, whose research is featured in *Silent Summer*, said such sights were now rare. In the book he links the decline with the growing use of pesticides on sheep and cattle. "If sheep or cattle are allowed to enter a

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FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB OF BALLARAT INCORPORATED
No. A0014919P ABN 13 150 403 135
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING - 9 APRIL 2010.

1. Opening and Apologies

The President, Elspeth Swan, welcomed 26 members & visitors.

Apologies were received from Peter and Claire Dalman, Chris and Anna Baulch, John Morrish, Tony Johns, Dulcie Brooke, Elizabeth Thurgood, Margaret Martin. *Accepted on the motion of Peter Billing; seconded Denis Thurgood.*

2. Minutes of previous meeting Tabled and Summarised in Ballarat Naturalist.
Confirmed on the motion of John Mildren, Seconded Paul Norquay.

3. Correspondence

IN:

- Geelong FNC: Geelong Naturalist, March 2010.
- Castlemaine FNC: Castlemaine Naturalist, March & April 2010.
- CSIRO Publishing: Flyer.
- Environment Victoria: Green Action News, Autumn 2010.
- Trust for Nature: Conservation Bulletin, March 2010.
- RHSV: Gardeners Gazette, Autumn 2010; Survey; Conference.
- Birds Australia: Volunteer Newsletter, March 2010; State of Australia's Birds 2009: Restoring Woodland Habitat for Birds.
- SEANA: Minutes of AGM and March general meeting.
- Corangamite CMA: Second Generation Landcare Grants.
- Bendigo Bank: Statement
- Thanks for SEANA Camp program and organisation: Norma and Peter Garlick, Eleanor Masterton, Pat & Russell Green, Beverley Leeson, Peter Williams, Hazel & Alan Veevers, Lynn & Neal Smith, Ann & Richard Andrews, Diane Luhrs,

OUT:

- CAV: Incorporation Annual Return.
- Helen Burgess: Thanks for service on the committee.
- Joan Garner: Thanks for leading Buninyong Gardens Excursion.

4. Business arising from correspondence:

Nil.

5. Reports

- Treasurer's Report: Treasurer's Report: Opening Balance \$6187.97; Income: \$476.00; Expenses: \$2896.10; Closing Balance: \$3767.87.
Received on the motion of Les Hanrahan, seconded: Carol Hall.
- SEANA Camp: Thanks to all the members who helped with registration, presentations, excursions, supper, reports, etc. 30 club members actively involved.
Les Hanrahan estimates that the profit will be about \$900.

6. General Business

- That Elspeth Swan be added as a signatory for the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc Account at Bendigo Bank. Moved: Les Hanrahan. Seconded: Nina Netherway. Carried.
- 2010 Syllabus has been printed and is available to members. Extra copies of a shorter version are available for promotion of the Club.

The committee is applying for a Volunteer Grants from Dept of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to purchase a data projector and associated equipment.

7. Show and Tell

- Carol Hall: Fly Agarics photographed under oak trees at LaGerche Walk, Creswick.
- Nina Netherway: Photograph of Golden Orbweaver at Miners Rest.
- Greg Binns: Documents and old bird books previously displayed at March Members Night.
- John Petheram: Rufous Fantail seen at St Georges Lake during SEANA camp.
- Bill Murphy: When children were blowing a whistle, Magpies joined in carolling.
- Greg Binns: Patches of water in Lake Burrumbeet after recent creek flows, but few birds. Shelduck, Black Duck, Brown Falcon and Swamp Harrier seen. At Russell reserve good numbers of Red-rumped Parrot, 2 parties of Eastern Rosella, a Grey Shrike-thrush and 12 Willy Wagtails present.
- Elspeth Swan: Leeches active in Stony Rises and Lavers Hill area.
- Paul Norquay: 3 Golden Orbweaver at Mt Egerton.
- John Gregurke: Fat-tailed Dunnart and Little Whip Snake seen at Illabarook Grasslands; Red-tip Greendhood flowering at Linton TFN block during SEANA excursion. Parson's Band flowering 4 days after March rain at Enfield and widespread at Staffordshire reef and Illabarook on 20 March.
- Ken Hammond: Rainbow Lorikeets seen over past 2-3 weeks in Wendouree.

8. Excursion Arrangements

- Sunday 11 April, Ken Hammond "Lake Wendouree and other wetlands". Excursion meeting place for 2010 will be the parking area of BGS and BHS boat sheds at southern end of Forest St.

9. Syllabus Item

Amanda Ashton and Tina Bell "*Casterton Fire Ecology Project*". Amanda spoke on small mammals, and Tina presented work by Fiona Christie on Fire and Herbivory. Elspeth Swan thanked them for their interesting presentations. Supper followed.

(*Contd.*) river after treatment the entire invertebrate population can be wiped out for miles downstream," he said.

What does such destruction mean for species higher up the food chain? Robert Robinson, of the British Trust for Ornithology, said the intensification of farming, and the consequent loss of habitat and food sources, had been "catastrophic" for farmland birds.

Starlings and swallows, both insect eaters, are among the worst affected with populations down by two-thirds since the mid-1970s. Hedgehog numbers are declining so fast that they could vanish by 2025. Silent Summer points out that the destruction of ecosystems also extends far out to sea, with many commercially exploited fish stocks at risk of collapse. Much of that is the result of overfishing but the destruction of seabed habitats by trawl nets is also to blame. Callum Roberts, professor of marine conservation at York University, said: "Repeated trawling has simply destroyed the seabed habitat and all the small plants and animals that grew on it — many of which were food for larger creatures."

Thanks to Carol Hall for this article.

CALENDAR 2010

MAY

- Fri 7 Marilyn Hewish, Geelong Field Naturalists Club *Owls & Other Birds of North America*
- Sat 8 *Haddon & Hillcrest areas.* Greg Binns OAM, Club Member
- Tues 11 *Excursion to Fiery Creek wetland near Cave Hill Creek. Meeting Ian Magee (Bendigo District Environment Council) to prepare plant list for the swamp. Gumboots may be useful.*
- Thurs 27 Mid Month Excursion—Bushranger Reserve Piggoreet

JUNE

- Fri 4 Prof. Peter Gell, Director, Centre for environmental Management, Uni. Of Ballarat. *Understanding Wetland Conditions: Lessons from the Past.*
- Sun 6 *Fungi.* Les Hanrahan, Club Member

FNCB Camp—Heath's Folly, Apollo Bay

June 21—25

Dates and names required now!

The times are flexible, you do not need to stay the whole week— but we need to know!



Committee

President.....Ms Elspeth Swan
 Vice-President.....Mr Greg Binns
 SecretaryMr John Gregurke
 TreasurerMr Les Hanrahan

Mrs Claire Dalman
 Mr Peter Dalman
 Dr Frances Hanrahan

Mrs Carol Hall
 Mrs Val Hocking
 Ms Nina Netherway (editor)

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

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 Editor: Nina Netherway,

Website: www.ballarat.yourguide.com.au Click on *Community>Local Clubs> Environment*

Meetings are held at the Prince of Wales Park Clubrooms in Prince of Wales Park, Gillies St on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions: Leave from the carpark adjacent to BGS & BHS boatsheds at the south end of Forest St., Wendouree.

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